

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS PLANNING DEPARTMENT

## DOWNTOWN EAST / NORTH LOOP MASTER PLAN

# Chapter One Introduction and Background



Figure 1.1  
Work Program and Process

The primary objective of the *Minneapolis Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan* is to encourage renewed interest in living, working, and shopping in downtown Minneapolis through the creation of a high-quality, easy-to-use physical environment, one that enhances the everyday urban experience. As such, the primary intent of this master plan is to:

- Promote strategies that integrate transportation and land use planning in order to encourage and realize more complete neighborhoods and communities;
- Capitalize on the introduction of improved public transit – light rail transit, commuter rail, bus rapid transit and other modes – and the prospect of making the downtown less auto-dependent;
- Foster the development of mixed-use precincts that combine commerce and housing;
- Set forth initiatives that will encourage the design and delivery of high quality public spaces and streetscapes.

### PROJECT WORK PLAN AND PROCESS

In the summer of 2001, the City of Minneapolis Planning Department commissioned a consultant team led by IBI Group to complete a Master Plan for two districts adjacent to the Downtown Core – Downtown East and the North Loop. In addition, the 5th Street Light Rail Transit (LRT) corridor was included because it joins these two districts together through the Downtown Core (see Figure 1.2, page 3). Throughout the second half of 2001 and the first half of 2002, the Consultant Team met on a regular basis with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) convened specifically for this project. During that time, the Consultant Team also conducted four workshops for a larger group of stakeholders – The Steering Committee, which included civic, neighborhood, and business leaders. Likewise, four Open Houses were conducted in

order to engage the general public and to seek their input into the master plan as it evolved (see Figure 1.1).

In addition, over the course of the year the work program followed a general planning sequence beginning with data collection and problem identification. Once this was completed, data analysis was initiated and various alternatives for potential outcomes were generated. These alternatives were reviewed and discussed by the Technical Advisory Committee, the Steering Committee and the general public in order to develop and strengthen a series of recommendations and proposals for action and implementation. What follows is a fully developed master plan that seeks to re-establish the goals and priorities for emerging redevelopment within the Project Area.

In accordance with directives established at the outset of the project, the master plan must be developed from the City's existing land use plan and zoning ordinances (see Figure 6.1, page 109). Therefore existing ordinances, prior planning reports, and base maps were analyzed. The Consultant Team also carried out extensive fieldwork and collected site photographs and sketches for subsequent use and analysis. Field collection and site surveys were compiled into three Technical Memoranda that were used for subsequent review and analysis by the Consultant Team:

- Technical Memorandum: Background Review and Problem Identification;
- Technical Memorandum: Building Blocks from Existing Studies;
- Technical Memorandum: Site Inventory and Analysis.

These technical memoranda are on file with the City of Minneapolis Planning Department.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

The analysis, findings, and recommendations associated with the Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan project are arranged in



Figure 1.2 Map of Hiawatha Light Rail Transit (LRT) Corridor

Source: Metropolitan Council

order to help the reader understand both the broad character and the detailed complexity of the subject matter. Chapters are structured to tell the story of the project's unfolding evolution. Maps, photos, tables, and illustrative renderings support the text of each chapter.

This Master Plan report is organized into seven chapters as follows:

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

### **Chapter 2: Planning Complete Communities**

Chapter Two outlines the key principals necessary for encouraging so-called “Complete Communities” in a mature downtown setting. Complete Communities are neighborhoods or districts that are self-sufficient by virtue of interconnected transit and commercial environments that are, in turn, surrounded by a diversity of housing types, services, and amenities. The chapter begins with a discussion and primer on the goals and objectives of transit-oriented development (TOD) and mixed-use development. Next, the chapter looks at some of the wider, emerging trends in urban residential development in U.S. cities today and considers how these trends might come to play in shaping Complete Communities. This is followed by a discussion of general strategies for downtown commercial environments. This section is particularly geared toward renewing the vigor of downtown retail – especially neighborhood-based retail meant to serve a growing downtown population. The chapter ends with a discussion of the general goals and recommendations for transportation, transit, and parking.

### **Chapter 3: Market Analysis**

Chapter Three summarizes the chief findings of a detailed market analysis of the Project Area. The intention of the market analysis is to identify the existing economic potential within the Project Area and to envision and describe the possibilities for future development in the Project Area. The chapter begins by looking at

regional development issues and moves on to an analysis of development forecasts for office, residential, retail, and lodging markets in Downtown Minneapolis over a twenty year timeframe. The chapter also discusses the level of influence that light rail transit has in these forecasts and the likely locations for TOD. In doing so, it ties expected market conditions to an analysis of land use planning issues.

### **Chapter 4: Land Use Plan**

Chapter Four begins by envisioning the Project Area as thirteen smaller districts or precincts, each of which is the basis for developing a Complete Community. The second part of the chapter summarizes the development and public presentation of three different land use scenarios that were compiled in order to discuss three different paths of growth and change that might be pursued: decentralization of the existing downtown core, continued centralization of the existing downtown core, and expansion of the existing downtown core. The third and main part of the chapter is a detailed description of the recommended land use plan and what it looks like on a precinct-by-precinct basis.

### **Chapter 5: Urban Design Plan**

Chapter Five sets out the Urban Design Plan for the Project Area. The Urban Design Plan includes a broad range of analysis and recommendations aimed at improving the character and quality of the built environment at a variety of scales – from the broad scope of Downtown as a whole to potential solutions for specific locations. The chapter begins by addressing the nuts-and-bolts of how the public realm should be improved by addressing the ways in which it is experienced while moving from place-to-place. The second section of the chapter offers two case studies, each with specific proposals for how to tackle two different kinds of urban design challenges. The third section looks in detail at ways to improve the overall experience of Downtown East and the North Loop by considering the role that “Gateways” and “View Corridors”



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### LEGEND

- HIAWATHA LRT (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)
- TRANSIT STATIONS
- - - PROPOSED RAIL TRANSIT LINES
- 5TH ST. STREETSCAPE PROJECT
- PROJECT AREA FOR DOWNTOWN EAST/NORTH LOOP MASTER PLAN
- PROJECT AREA FOR HENNEPIN COUNTY MULTI-MODAL STATION AREA PLAN
- PROJECT AREA FOR ELLIOT PARK MASTER PLAN

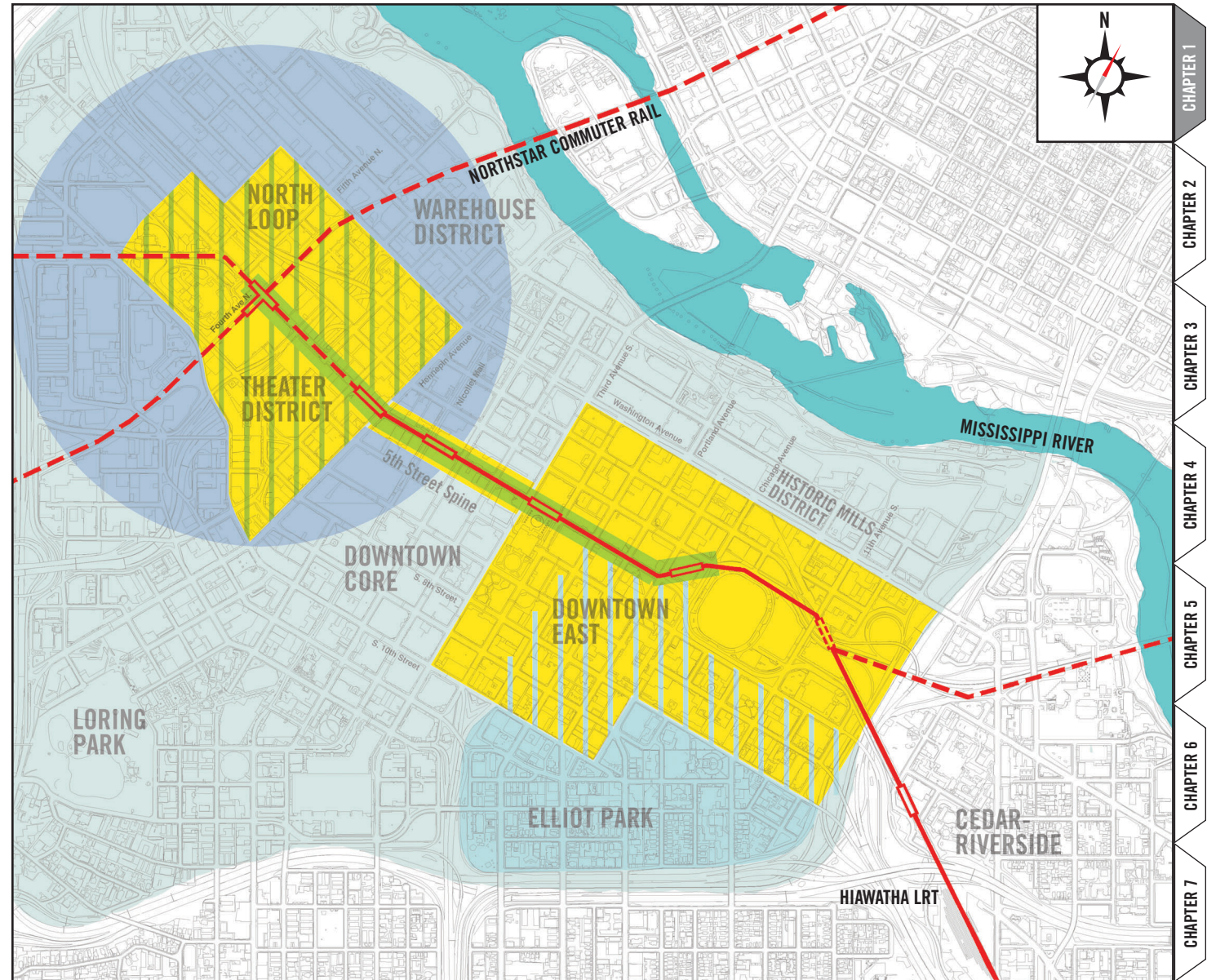


Figure 1.3 Map of Project Area

play in the wider built environment of the Downtown and in the City as a whole. The fourth section of the chapter is an in-depth look at the relationship between the design of individual buildings, the intensity of land uses, and the overall character of the city. The chapter ends by presenting images of three-dimensional computer models and character sketches that are developed from the information in the recommended Land Use Plan.

### Chapter 6: Modifications to the Local Regulatory Framework

Chapter Six considers how the City's primary regulatory tool for guiding new projects – the Zoning Code – could be adapted or modified in ways that remove existing barriers to the vision contemplated. The chapter begins by reviewing the basic zoning categories that are found within the Project Area and evaluates how well each category is suited to accommodating the kinds of change sought in forging Complete Communities. This analysis is followed by a series of proposals and recommendations for how the Zoning Code should be modified in order to help the development community overcome the challenges inherent in the existing zoning categories, especially as they relate to specific development precincts with the Project Area. Finally, the chapter considers enhancements to the City's regulatory framework that would help to ensure that improvements to downtown infrastructure and public amenities proceed in pace with new building development.

### Chapter 7: Implementation and Phasing Plan

Chapter Seven considers the issue of how and when the vision called for in previous chapters of this document might be implemented into the physical environment of the Project Area. The first section of Chapter Seven is intended to help the City establish priorities for moving forward with enhancements to the public realm and infrastructure. The second section of the chapter is intended to help the development community understand the potential that lies within the Project Area. By drawing on information derived from the market analysis, Chapter Seven presents the

key development objectives and projects that will be necessary to implement the vision called for in the master plan. Additionally, it describes individual springboard projects that are intended to be illustrative demonstrations of how the principles of the plan are applied in selected locations throughout the Project Area. Finally, the chapter includes an extensive implementation matrix with block-by-block information that will need to be considered in packaging any development proposal that falls within the boundaries of the Project Area.

### PROJECT AREA BOUNDARIES

The boundaries for the Project Area include a central spine, running along 5th Street and two larger districts on both the east and west sides of the Downtown Core – Downtown East and the North Loop. The extent of the Project Area boundaries are illustrated on the Project Area map (see Figure 1.3, page 5), and Project Area Aerial photo (see Figure 1.4, page 8).

*Center Spine:* The “Center Spine” portion of the Project Area is defined as one-half block on the north and south sides of South 5th Street between Hennepin Avenue and Third Avenue South.

*Downtown East:* The “Downtown East” portion of the Project Area is defined as the area that stretches between Third Avenue South on the west, Interstate 35W on the east, and Washington Avenue South on the north. The southern boundary of this district is irregular and runs from the intersection of Third Avenue South and South 10th Street, eastward to Centennial Place and South 10th Street. From there it runs northward two blocks along Centennial Place and Chicago Avenue to the intersection of South 8th Street and Chicago Avenue and then turns east once again, running along South 8th Street to I-35W.

*The North Loop:* The “North Loop” portion of the Project Area is defined as the area that stretches from Hennepin Avenue on the east to Seventh Avenue North on the west. (South of North 5th

Street, the western boundary of the Project Area approximates the line of Seventh Avenue North). Washington Avenue North forms the northern boundary of this district. North 7th Street and North 10th Street comprise the southern boundary of the district.

### **CONCURRENT PLANNING EFFORTS**

Three other master planning efforts are currently underway or recently completed in Downtown Minneapolis, each of which has some measure of overlap with the goals and objectives of the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*.

*Downtown Minneapolis Multi-Modal Station Area Plan:* In conjunction with the introduction of the NorthStar Commuter Rail to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region, Hennepin County has undertaken a master planning effort in the vicinity of North 5th Street and Fifth Avenue North in the North Loop neighborhood of Downtown Minneapolis. The Project Area for the County's study extends in a one-half mile radius around the intermodal station site. Hennepin County's Multi-Modal Station Area Plan was completed in early 2002.

*Elliot Park Master Plan:* Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. (EPNI) has recently completed a neighborhood-based master planning process for the Elliot Park neighborhood, which is located in the southeast corner of Downtown Minneapolis. The intention of that exercise was to develop ideas and scenarios for refining the character of the neighborhood while attracting new development to this part of Downtown. The Project Area for the EPNI master plan overlaps the Downtown East portion of the Project Area. The Elliot Park Master Plan was completed in the summer of 2002. Similar to the Hennepin County study in the North Loop Area, the findings of the EPNI study were carefully considered as a base of work that can be responded to while carrying out the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*.

It is the explicit intent of the *Downtown East/North Loop Master*

*Plan* to formulate policies, tools, and mechanisms that can be used to effect the kinds of proposals brought forward in both master planning efforts.

*Ballpark Planning Efforts:* Several years ago, a blue ribbon committee was established by the Minneapolis City Council and others to undertake research concerning the potential siting and construction of an urban ballpark in Downtown Minneapolis. Given the direction of the committee and the existing City policy at the time when this project was established, the Consultant Team was directed to pursue planning options for the North Loop based on the assumption that if a stadium was to be built, it would be sited on or above the existing surface parking lots south of North 5th Street and east of the Burlington Northern right-of-way. Because the site for even the potential existence of a downtown baseball stadium cannot be confirmed at this time, a whole range of site-specific information concerning stadium planning efforts has not been addressed in detail.

Care was taken to fully understand the issues discussed in each of these three parallel projects and to incorporate their findings and recommendations into the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*.



## LEGEND

- HIAWATHA LRT (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)
- TRANSIT STATIONS
- - - PROPOSED RAIL TRANSIT LINES
- PROJECT AREA BOUNDARY

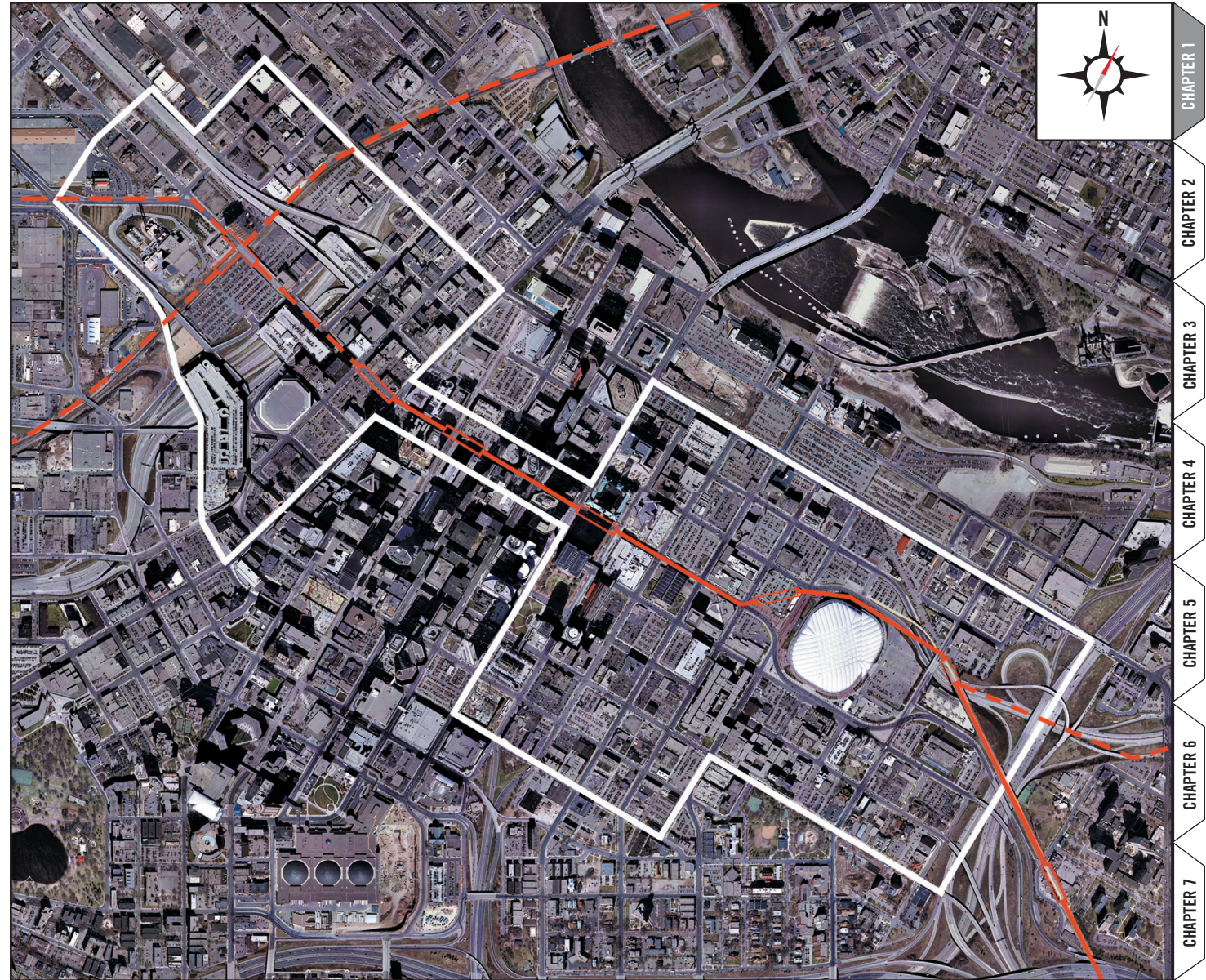


Figure 1.4 Aerial Photo of Project Area